Note Taking and Analyzing Qualitative Data

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Overview

- How to take notes
- What to do with those notes
  - How to analyze “qualitative data”
Outline

● Goals of note taking
● How to take notes
● How to analyze those notes (i.e., qualitative data)
  – Data management
  – Analyzing qualitative data
  – Content analysis
● Questions on your projects
Goals of Note Taking
Adapted from material provided by Prof. Asha Agrawal

- What MIGHT your goals be?
- Possible goals
  - Retrieve details from original documents you read
  - Compile information if you cannot go back to originals
  - Keep track of what you have already read, so that you don’t hunt for it again
    - To help you understand what you are reading
    - To help you remember what to read again later
    - To help you remember what you read
How to Take Notes

1) Various source material
2) Detailed evidence to support statements
3) Note-taking is part of a process
4) You will only use a portion of your notes
5) Compress the information
How to Take Notes, con’t

6) Highlight key points
7) Be selective
8) Problems with too many notes
   – Transcribing too much of the original
   – Being unselective in topic choice
9) Solution to too many notes
   – Avoid being descriptive
   – *Think* more…*write* less
   – Be very selective
10) Good Layout

- Note your source
- Write clearly
- Use a system of tabulation
- Avoid continuous prose
- Devise a logical layout
- Use a new page for each set of notes
- Write on one side of the page only
Note Taking Examples

- Interviews
  - Practice interview and note taking before conducting “real” ones
  - Record interview if possible
  - Immediately after the interview, review notes and fill in gaps
  - Later that same day, review/type/transcribe the notes from the interview
Note Taking Examples, con’t

● Documents (e.g., general plans, zoning codes, maps)
  – List key themes to look for before reviewing documents
  – Put “data” into a grid, matrix, spreadsheet or systematic file
Note Taking Examples, con’t

- Observations (e.g., activity in parks or plazas)
  - List key themes to look for before reviewing documents
  - Put “data” into a grid, matrix, spreadsheet or systematic file
What to do with all that data

Introduction

• Qualitative Data Analyses (QDA)
  ● Choices & decisions
  ● Iterative process: reading, describing & interpreting
Data Management

- Disguise participants
  - Create a filing system: an excel file, a database file, or some other tool and be consistent
- Qualitative Data Analysis software
  - ATLAS/ti, NUD*IST, MaxQDA,
  - Hyper RESEARCH (MAC compatible),
  - The Ethnograph
  - CDC EZ-Text (Free download): [www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/software/ez-text/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/software/ez-text/index.htm)
Analyzing Qualitative Data - Overview

- Filtering Data
  - Start with raw data (e.g., maps, field notes, interview transcripts)
    - Codes, themes, categories
    - Log all decisions in a journal
  - Various approaches to present/write up the data (discuss in a few minutes)
Coding

- Identifying and labeling codes
  - Begin with open codes
  - Write in margins
  - After 3-4 transcripts, compile a start-list of codes
  - Trim back code list
  - Avoid professional jargon
  - Labels should be brief but descriptive
  - Keep a log of decisions
Categories & Themes

- Producing Categories and Themes
  - Cut & paste coded segments
  - Use QDA software
  - Might use:
    - Schemas
    - Metaphor & analogies
    - Themes & subthemes
Qualitative Data Presentation

Case Summaries
Data Displays (e.g., matrix)
Content Analysis

Steps in Conducting Content Analysis

1) Frame a research question
2) Decide on source materials
3) Decide on unit of analysis
4) Decide on sampling design
5) Conduct reliability checks
References